

# Cathy McMorris

7th District State Representative

## Back-to-School Education Update



October 2001

### School Districts within the 7<sup>th</sup> Legislative District

#### **Ferry County**

Curlew School District  
Inchelium School District  
Keller School District  
Orient School District  
Republic School District

#### **Pend Oreille County**

Cusick School District  
Newport School District  
Selkirk School District

#### **Lincoln County**

Almira School District  
Creston School District  
Davenport School District  
Harrington School District  
Odessa School District  
Reardan-Edwall School District  
Sprague School District  
Wilbur School District

#### **Okanogan County**

Nespelem School District  
Omak School District  
Oroville School District  
Tonasket School District

#### **Stevens County**

Chewelah School District  
Columbia School District  
Colville School District  
Evergreen School District  
Kettle Falls School District  
Loon Lake School District  
Mary Walker School District  
Northport School District  
Onion Creek School District  
Summit Valley School District  
Valley School District  
Wellpinit School District

#### **Spokane County**

Deer Park School District  
Nine Mile Falls School District  
Riverside School District  
Mead School District

Dear friends,

Now that the weather is getting a little chilly and children have returned from summer break back to the classrooms, I thought this might be a good time to discuss education and — more specifically — changes we've made in the Legislature to improve our schools and increase learning opportunities for students.

This year we enacted legislation that will bring more qualified professionals to the classroom and provide incentives to keep some of our more experienced educators working with children.

Some significant changes in state funding were also approved, thanks in large part to the voters, who approved two initiatives providing automatic teacher pay raises and dedicated funding for specific education enhancements.

In addition, the Legislature passed my bill to help our smaller school districts get better rates and more choices in health insurance for its employees. In a time when budgets are tight, this savings will be especially helpful for our smaller, rural schools.

Of course our true focus, whether it be budgeting or policy changes, is aimed at increasing student achievement.

I hope this update gives you a better idea of some of the things lawmakers are working on to improve learning opportunities. As always, I welcome your calls and letters if you have questions about our schools or other legislative issues.

Thank you for the opportunity to represent our communities in the state Legislature. It is an honor to serve you.

Sincerely,

**Cathy McMorris**  
**State Representative**



# Representative *Cathy* McMorris

## ACCOUNTABILITY IN OUR SCHOOLS

### *The next step toward educational excellence*

I had hoped the Legislature would have moved forward this year with new policies to help schools meet new accountability standards. Unfortunately, it didn't happen.

We have set our sights high with new academic learning requirements and are using standardized tests to measure our effectiveness in improving student learning. Our next step is to set up a system of accountability that will allow us to assist parents and schools where test scores are not demonstrating improvement.

Education accountability will be a top priority for the Legislature during the 2002 session, which begins in January. It will require bureaucratic barriers now preventing us from improving performance in our schools to be dismantled.

Our teachers know we are counting on them to help students achieve excellence. I believe the Legislature also should proceed with an accountability plan to help schools that are not meeting academic standards.

### **Voter-approved funding measures bolster school budgets**

Washington is now spending \$9.9 billion per biennium on K-12 education, which represents 43.5 percent of the entire state budget. Voters made a strong statement in favor of funding for schools by approving two education initiatives last November. The initiatives along with other enhancements resulted in an 8.7 percent increase in funding for education.

Initiative 732 guarantees annual cost-of-living pay increases for teachers based on the Seattle consumer price index – a very aggressive inflation indicator.

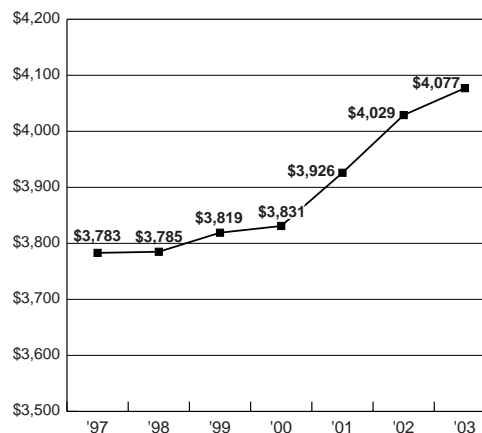
I-728 provides that the revenue distributions to school districts may be used for:

- Reducing class size
- Providing extended learning opportunities in grades K-12, including extended school hours, tutoring programs, weekend school programs, and all-day kindergarten
- Providing additional professional development for educators

- Providing early assistance for children in need of pre-kindergarten support, and
- Providing improvements or additions to school building facilities

The cost of the two initiatives totals nearly \$800 million in the current budget and will increase to more than \$1 billion in additional funding for schools in the next biennium.

I'm hopeful these and other funding enhancements provided in the state budget for our schools will achieve measurable improvement in student achievement. My statement, however, is tempered by my concern that the overall spending level in the current budget is higher than we can sustain, and could force cuts to existing programs or tax increases in the near future.



*The amount of state funding provided per pupil has increased every year for the past six years, even after adjusting for inflation.*

### **Making every tax dollar count**

At a time when the budget is tight and there is so much uncertainty in our economy, it's wise to find efficiencies and make every tax dollar count. This year, I introduced legislation to allow school districts to be included in the definition of "small employer" or "small group" for the purpose of purchasing health insurance. The new designation, passed into law by the Legislature, will help schools to qualify for health insurance at small group rates. This will reduce costs for our smaller, rural school districts, and provide more health insurance options for teachers and school employees.

# Back-to-School Education Update

## Attracting quality teachers to our public schools

In an ongoing effort to improve our public schools and provide the best opportunity for children to learn, I supported legislation adopted this year by the Legislature that will help our schools attract and retain the most qualified teachers to the classroom.

Among the bills approved this session was Senate Bill 5695, a measure that creates a statewide partnership grant program to establish alternative certification programs for classified school employees and successful professionals who want to enter the teaching profession.

The bill will make it easier for qualified individuals to become certified to teach. This will help to alleviate the growing problem of teacher shortages in schools and enhance the learning experience for students by bringing to the classroom the expertise of qualified individuals who have successful real-world experience.

The Legislature also approved, and I supported, a measure to increase the number of hours retired teachers can continue to work without a reduction in pension benefits. This will allow our schools to continue calling upon our most experienced teachers for part-time or substitute work.



*Rep. Cathy McMorris speaks with Valley School District students in Stevens County.*

## McMorris meets with school superintendents, teachers

Often the best way to learn more about how to improve our educational system for children is by visiting our local schools. This fall, Sen. Bob Morton, Rep. Bob Sump and I have made an effort to visit as many schools as possible throughout the 7<sup>th</sup> District. We've

met with many of our school superintendents, discussing specific education issues/priorities impacting each school and listening to their concerns and suggestions. We've spent time talking with teachers, school board members, and most importantly, parents. These discussions have provided us with valuable information about our schools and their needs. Our goal is to reach out to as many of our local school districts as possible before the 2002 legislative session begins in January.

## Chewelah Peak Learning Center *A community dream coming true*

High on the list of successes during the 2001 legislative session is the appropriation of \$2 million in the capital budget for the proposed Chewelah Peak Learning Center in Stevens County.

The center, which will be located on 20 acres of forested lands near Chewelah, will provide supervised outdoor education, leadership development and team building to young people in cooperation with Eastern Washington schools.

In addition, it will provide in-service training to teachers and outdoor leadership training to adult groups. The center also will bring additional jobs to the area, boosting the local economy.

At a time when we are encouraging our children to gain "hands-on" experience and develop character and leadership qualities, the Chewelah Peak Learning Center will provide the opportunity to benefit not only our children and our schools, but our community as well.

To learn more about this unique facility, visit the Chewelah Peak Learning Center website at: [www.awsp.org/chewelahpeak](http://www.awsp.org/chewelahpeak).



# Representative *Cathy* McMorris

## Schools to receive 2001 Reading Achievement Award

Congratulations to the fourth-grade classes in following schools for meeting and exceeding their reading improvement goals:

**Kettle Falls  
Northport  
Oroville  
P.C. Jantz, Odessa**

## Keeping in touch

Education is an extremely important issue to our district. That's why I've been spending time meeting with school officials throughout the local area. However, many other issues also are important to 7<sup>th</sup> District citizens.

Anytime you have a question, a concern or an idea to share, I hope you will pick up the phone, write me a letter, or send me an e-mail. Many bills in the Legislature are the result of citizen suggestions. One of those suggestions (a way to reduce health insurance costs for small schools) came from a local citizen who contacted me this year. That bill was recently signed into law. Hearing from you helps me to best represent your interests.

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- Attracting quality teachers
- Improving accountability
- Chewelah Peak Learning Center

**EDUCATION UPDATE - INSIDE**

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*Cathy*

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